

**WEST DES MOINES PARKS AND RECREATION ADVISORY BOARD PROCEEDINGS**  
**Thursday, April 16, 2015**

The meeting of the West Des Moines Parks and Recreation Advisory Board was called to order on Thursday, April 16, at 5:30 p.m. by Rick Swalwell.

<b>Commission</b>	Heather Schebel	Rick Swalwell	Forrest Ridgway	Mike Chambers	Joe Hrdlicka
<b>Present</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>Arrived at 5:49pm</b>	

<b>Staff</b>	Susan Mathews <i>Parks &amp; Recreation Administrative Secretary</i>	Sally Ortgies <i>Superintendent of Parks</i>	Greg Hansen <i>Superintendent of Recreation</i>	Gary Scott <i>Director of Parks &amp; Recreation</i>
<b>Present</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	<b>X</b>	

**On Item 1. Approval of Agenda**

Ridgway moved to change the order of the agenda by moving item 5C. to item 3. due to the number of attendees for the item. Schebel seconded. Motion carried.

**On Item 2. Citizen Forum**

No items.

**On Item 3. Motion – Request to place a riverboat at Raccoon River Park**

Swalwell gave an overview of electronic and social media communication regarding the proposal. He shared that staff received email input from 112 people (22 in favor, 87 opposed and 3 with questions). Swalwell shared that the Facilities Committee met and considered the issue. Schebel noted that on April 3 and April 9 the Facilities Committee met and reviewed public feedback, the proposed location, issues with the fire code, and the purpose of the Park. She shared that the Facility Committee's recommendation is that the Board not approve the request to place a riverboat at Raccoon River Park.

**1. Public comment**

Mike La Valle, 435 49<sup>th</sup> St., Des Moines

La Valle noted that there have been many comments about money. He shared that his family has a long history of running concessions and that any seasonal business has a high likelihood of being a not-for-profit. La Valle expressed motivation to do something positive for the community instead of operating a business for money. He also addressed another potential concern that the Riverboat will be disruptive by stating that it has not been the case for the last 25 years on the Des Moines River. He suggested that one way or the other the debate has brought attention to watersports in West Des Moines. La Valle suggested that a canoe and kayak business would have more hours of operation than the Riverboat. He added that the boat is not a restaurant, it is an excursion boat. He shared that the Riverboat has never had an accident. He offered to come back up to answer any questions people may have and expressed appreciation for the Board listening to the request.

Ridgway stated that the money aspect is important and asked La Valle to give an overview of how he envisions the funding of the operation. La Valle noted that moving the boat is expensive, so he asked the City for assistance with the \$30,000 cost as well as an access path to the boat, and water and electric hookups. He suggested that the role of a park is to increase access to nature. Swalwell clarified that a canoe/kayak concession was not a part of the original proposal and would be a separate matter. He stated that the proposal to place a Riverboat at Raccoon River Park is what is being considered tonight. He added that the City would conduct a Request for

Proposal process when soliciting outside services which provides the opportunity for any potential provider of the service to make a proposal. He added there could certainly be other people interested in and capable of providing canoe/kayak services but it was less likely there would be other people interested in providing a riverboat service.

Neil Broderick, 1226 Glen Oaks Drive, WDM

As a 15 year resident of WDM, Broderick expressed empathy with people opposed to the idea but suggested that there are lots of reasons not to do something. He requested that the Board make a recommendation to City Council to try this unique opportunity and see if it works.

Mike Myers, 1400 S. 52<sup>nd</sup> Street, WDM

Myers suggested that the riverboat could operate without complaint on the right body of water but not on a shallow draft, 232 acre, no-wake lake. He suggested that the lake and its eco systems are the draw and that the Park itself is secondary. He added that many people come for the solace of the lake. Myers expressed a concern about the noise level of the riverboat and the clientele. He suggested it is not a terrible idea for the right lake but for Raccoon River Park it is totally inappropriate.

Michael Gaunt, 936 15<sup>th</sup> Street, WDM

Gaunt noted that he has provided feedback by email and Facebook. He showed some simulated images of what the boat would look like on various parts of the lake. He suggested it is a very natural setting and that while he does not have anything against the riverboat in general, this is the wrong lake to put it on.

Kevin Fitzpatrick, 507 29<sup>th</sup> Street, WDM

Fitzpatrick has used Raccoon River Park extensively over the last 17 years and thinks of sports and physical recreation, family and nature, not riverboats. Fitzpatrick strongly encouraged the Board to turn the proposal down. He quoted from the City's Raccoon River Park website, "The 631 acres of parkland provide active and passive recreational experiences, along with several hundred acres of natural areas for wildlife." "The trail winds its way between the lake and the Raccoon River providing a natural experience that can rarely be found in an urban environment." Fitzpatrick stated that with those statements alone he cannot reconcile the idea of a riverboat.

Mike McCoy, 4326 Oakwood Lane, WDM

McCoy shared he is a frequent user of the park and lake and is speaking in favor of the excursion boat. He added that it provides a unique activity in the metro area and provides the park with tourism and revenue. McCoy stated that Mike is an experienced entrepreneur with a great track record. McCoy shared that he has been on the boat and thinks it is clean, safe and not loud and would be an interesting addition that people in WDM would enjoy.

Jim Kirkpatrick, 2821 Woodland Avenue, WDM

Kirkpatrick noted that he is a 25 year resident of WDM and has used the lake since before it became a park. He shared that he is against the excursion boat based on the size and depth of the lake. Kirkpatrick expressed concerns that the quality of the experience for current users would be reduced. He added that he kayaks there 3-4 times per week. He added that the no wake law preserves the tranquility of the lake. He shared his belief that the Iowa DNR standard for a wake is any displacement of water by a boat that disturbs other boats or the shoreline. He added that it does not matter the speed or the height. Kirkpatrick stated that he does not want any of his tax dollars assisting with the boat on the lake.

Larry Willson, 1400 S. 52<sup>nd</sup> Street, WDM

Willson stated that he is really opposed to the excursion boat. He shared that he uses a fishing boat on the lake and finds it very hard to not make a wake. He added there are many areas that are very shallow and the lake is overall too small for this type of recreational vehicle. Willson added that he is opposed to using tax dollars for this project. He inquired how the boat would be stored for the winter when the lake is frozen.

Dave Freylack, 1920 E. 13<sup>th</sup> Street, Des Moines

Freylack works at Brightwell's Boathouse and owned Birdland Marine for 28 years. He stated that WDM has a great resource that should be utilized. He added that the excursion boat will allow the young and old to get out into the wild. Freylack stated that he's seen the paddle wheeler on the water and it does not have much of a wake.

Phil Gardener, 8207 Alpine Drive, Urbandale

Gardener stated that he works for Americans for Prosperity here in Iowa and urged the Board to vote no. He added that things like this should be privately financed and privately run.

Jonas Cutler, 4300 Maple Street, WDM

Cutler stated he is in opposition to this idea due to the cost. He questions why the City would fund startup costs for a for-profit entity. He added that if the business was viable it would not need tax payer money. Cutler shared that the "try it" approach does not work here because of the money spent upfront on infrastructure. Cutler quoted Samuel Merrill, Iowa's seventh Governor, "The public service should be distinguished from the most rigid economy. Let us refrain from every outlay which actual wealth alone could justify."

Mark Stelmacher, 3025 Boulder Drive, WDM

Stelmacher shared that he is a 26 year resident of WDM and he strongly opposes the excursion boat on the lake. He added that he and his wife swim, kayak, canoe, jog and bicycle at this gem of a passive-use lake. He added that the excursion boat idea is awesome, just not at this lake because of the size. He expressed concerns about the noise of the diesel engine as well as the potential wake. Stelmacher also questioned the financial viability of the boat saying that he would go on a Riverboat cruise if it went somewhere but this boat will not go anywhere because the lake is too small. Stelmacher shared he is also opposed to using the City's financial resources to support this.

Wendy Ogden, 1723 Thornwood Road, WDM

Ogden stated that she has been a resident for 26 years and that the lake is a gem and such a unique aspect in WDM. She shared that she and her husband bike, walk, kayak, canoe, hang out and picnic there. They always comment to each other how amazing it is to be there and not feel like you are in the middle of a suburb. Ogden shared that she likes Mr. Valle and loves the Embassy Club and all that he's done for our community but would like to see a different option for this boat. She urged the Board to preserve the natural aspects of the lake

Diane Alphson, 502 Spruce Avenue, WDM

Alphson encouraged the Board to vote no. She and her family enjoy canoeing and kayaking on the lake to see the wildlife.

Dave Saggau, 219 S. 33<sup>rd</sup> Street, WDM

Saggau is a 20 year resident of WDM. He shared that he was just at the park this morning running and admiring the wildlife. He added that it is a small water system and that it is hard to image a boat of this size and age that wouldn't significantly affect the eco system. Saggau asked the Board to preserve the nature and to please vote no.

Pat Cummings, 1207 21<sup>st</sup> Street, WDM

Cummings stated that he has been a resident of WDM for over 40 years and he uses the lake 4-5 times per week fishing and kayaking. He added that doing this would contradict the purpose of the natural lake and wildlife. Cummings added that he is concerned about droughts that have a significant impact on the levels.

Tom Swartwood, 1105 Browns Woods Drive, WDM

Swartwood's property backs up to Raccoon River Park and he has seen a change in the Park and the WDM community in the 20 years he has been here. He suggested there must be a way to keep groups happy. He added that he is a friend of Mike's and he would like to see an attraction so more people can enjoy the property. He added that the ultimate decision is what kind of a park will Raccoon River Park be? He asked the Board to look at creative solutions to accommodate an attraction like the excursion boat.

Steve Morain, 645 SE Woodcrest Drive, Wauke

Morain shared that he is a former WDM resident and that he is a biker, hiker and kayaker and has been near the riverboat while kayaking on the Des Moines River and enjoyed it. He has also been on the riverboat and feels it is a unique opportunity.

A member of the audience asked about alcohol on the boat and security. LaValle responded it holds a liquor license and that some cruises have alcohol and some do not. He added that he has operated the boat for 25 years on the Des Moines River and it has coexisted peacefully with other users. He shared that it draws two feet of water and has no through the hull valves, the hydraulic system operates on biodegradable oil and has one engine that does not exhaust into the water. He added that it is rated by the Coast Guard for 80 people, has a completely flat bottom and was built in Dubuque, Iowa and has never had an injury or accident. He stated that it doesn't have any real outdoor area to speak of, only about 5 people would fit out on the back deck.

A member of the audience asked LaValle if he had considered putting the boat on a larger body of water. LaValle stated that his original proposal letter dated February 3, the kayak and canoe operation was included. He added that Saylorville is windy, distant from Des Moines and the depth can vary greatly. LaValle thinks a smaller lake would be a better fit. LaValle suggested using concession revenues to support other park functions such as a lifeguard at the beach. LaValle stated that 40% of people in West Des Moines don't own a home and can't own a boat.

A member of the audience asked how the boat would be stored in the winter. LaValle responded that it would be frozen in place and locked at the dock.

A member of the audience asked about times and costs. LaValle said that the first cruise of the day would be at lunch time and would be about \$25, dinner cruises would be about \$40, and excursion cruises \$12.50- \$15 with children being ½ price. He suggested cruises would be about 60-90 minutes in length. LaValle stated he would be open to proposed operating hours to create the least amount of friction with other lake users.

A member of the audience asked where it would go. LaValle suggested that each cruise would take one cruise around the lake and that short duration cruises have been accepted in the past. Councilman Russ Trimble asked for show of hands of opposed versus in favor. Trimble asked how and how often it is fueled. LaValle responded about once a month a fuel truck refills at the dock with #2 diesel.

A member of the audience asked how riding on a completely enclosed boat with no outside space would be getting people into nature. LaValle responded there are a lot of windows and the Iowa climate is not friendly to open deck boats. He added that it has the potential to be a floating classroom.

A member of the audience asked why the boat is leaving the DSM River. LaValle responded that the primary reason is flooding.

A member of the audience asked if additional parking would be needed. LaValle responded that the parking available would be better than at the Des Moines River location. Ortgies provided information about the number of spots available at the boat ramp and stated that overflow parking would need to be in the parking lot serving the Soccer Complex.

A member of the audience asked if it is operated as a for-profit business and who would cover maintenance costs. LaValle responded yes, they are an LLC. He added that his business would be responsible for everything floating and that he can't dictate what is built on public property. Ortgies added that the City would not be putting in a dock that would be Mr. LaValle's responsibility. She stated that the City would be putting in a handicapped accessible walkway to the dock as well as water and electrical service, per LaValle's request. Ortgies noted those are the items included in the \$150,000 of City money toward the project. LaValle expressed intention that the concession pays for those costs as a portion of each user's revenue would go to the City to pay back those costs.

A member of the audience showed a sketch of the lake showing his perceived area where the boat could travel. Another member of the audience added that the sketch assumes normal water levels and that in the event the lake level drops even a few feet the travel area would be significantly reduced.

A member of the audience asked what the City's liability would be due to having alcohol served on the boat. Ortgies responded that those details would have to be worked out but that any concessionaire is required to have insurance that also protects the City and that currently the only alcohol allowed in parks is beer in cans up to 16 oz. She added that additional special approvals may be needed.

A member of the audience asked if an environmental impact study could be performed. LaValle responded that would turn into an expensive boondoggle. He added that he has decades of experience with the boat and that in his opinion it has less impact than a bass boat would have.

A member of the audience asked what fees LaValle would pay to the City. LaValle shared that there are various models used that could be adjusted but that 5-10% or some dollar amount of each ticket. Ortgies shared that the concessionaire at the Softball Complex in Raccoon River Park pays 18% of gross income with a minimum \$30,000 per year.

A member of the audience asked if LaValle was aware of the construction to take place along Grand Avenue impacting access to the Park in summer of 2015. LaValle responded that was something that was faced at the Des Moines location as well.

Swalwell asked for final comments or questions. Seeing none he declared the public comment portion closed and stated that following the Board's discussion and recommendation they would take a 5 minute break before continuing with the remainder of the agenda. Swalwell thanked everyone for their comments.

## 2. Recommendation to City Council

Ridgway suggested that it is unique idea but the issue is the location. He added that in hearing all the comments tonight he does not believe this is the best location for the boat.

Chambers agreed that the venture would be better on a more developed, commercial lake and that he would like to see Blue Heron Lake remain passive-use.

Schebel stated that that she enjoyed hearing that so many people use and enjoy Raccoon River Park in the same way that she does and that she would not want to do anything to disrupt that.

Swalwell stated that no matter what decisions have to be made, Board members are great about removing themselves personally and making objective decisions that are best for the community. He added that is really hard tonight because that Park is a special place for him and for his family, and he doesn't think the excursion boat fits there.

Ridgway moved to approve the Facilities Committee recommendation to City Council to deny the request to place a Riverboat at Raccoon River Park. Chambers seconded. Motion carried.

The Board took a 5 minute recess and reconvened at 7:01pm.

## On Item 4. Approval of Minutes of March 19, 2015 Meeting

Chambers moved to approve the minutes as presented. Ridgway seconded. Motion carried.

## On Item 5. Old Business

No items.

## New Business:

### On Item 6A. Presentations – Annual Reports

#### 1. West Des Moines Girls Softball

Hansen noted that Angie Spann with the WDM Girls Softball Association was here but due to the change in the agenda and schedule she had to leave to go to a game. She asked Hansen to express her appreciation to the Board for the restroom improvements and the upcoming sidewalk project. Hansen will provide their presentation via email.

#### 2. West Des Moines Soccer Club

Hansen noted that Gareth Smith with the WDM Soccer Club was here but due to the change in the agenda and schedule he had to leave to go to the Club's monthly meeting. Hansen will provide their presentation via email.

#### 3. International Soccer League of Iowa

Sergio Gonzales and Tito Ochoa

Gonzales shared that the League has been in the metro area about 20 years. Currently they have about 40 teams with over 1000 players. They play 20 games each Sunday throughout the metro with some games in WDM at Crossroads Park. Ortgies shared that Hansen will be taking over agreements

and coordination with Sports Leagues but shared that the League has been very responsive to take care of any issues this past year.

On Item 6B. Motion – Approval of Recommendation to City Council – Park Use Agreement – International Soccer League of Iowa

Hansen shared that this item is a renewal with no changes from the prior year.

Ridgway moved to approve the recommendation to City Council to approve the agreement. Schebel seconded. Motion carried.

On Item 6C. Motion – Recommendation to City Council – Proposal to install an outdoor warm weather hockey facility at Raccoon River Park

Schebel noted that the Facilities Committee met twice to consider this issue. She noted that at the first meeting they were in favor of the recommendation. She added they believe it is a great idea and a great use of the park. Schebel stated that the Committee then learned that the requestor would require space to store a trailer necessary for operations. She added that the cost of a permanent structure would increase the cost from about \$200,000 to \$800,000. Ortgies added that the trailer would have been comparable to a construction trailer and would not be easily moved in and out, she also added that he would operate equipment rental and a pro shop out of the trailer and that would not be allowed in the current zoning of the park. The Board discussed reassessing the item during the annual Capital Improvement process.

Chambers moved to approve the Facilities Committee recommendation to City Council to deny the proposal to install an outdoor warm weather hockey facility at Raccoon River Park. Ridgway seconded. Motion carried.

#### Staff Reports:

On Item 7A. Superintendent of Parks

Ortgies shared that Emerald Ash Borer was discovered in the southeast corner of Dallas County right across from WDM City limits. She added that with City Council's support of the EAB program, West Des Moines is very well prepared. Swalwell suggested that the City consider having an informational meeting or workshop for local arborists and other tree professionals. Ortgies noted that the Iowa Department of Natural Resources and Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship have been hosting those types of meetings and are providing great information. She added that the City's website information is also being kept up-to-date with links and resources as well. Ridgway asked about the best time to treat. Ortgies responded that the most effective treatments are injections done between May and July. Trimble commended the Board and staff for bringing this issue to the City Council early. Ortgies shared that on Sunday, May 17, at noon at the Jordan House the department will help the WDM Historical Society host a Discover Decoration Day event which will feature the WDM Community Band playing Civil War era tunes, and self-guided tours of Jordan Cemetery. She also added that the City's Arbor Day celebration will take place on Friday, April 24 at 11:00am at the Jordan House where they will plant a Burr Oak tree in memory of the Jordan family.

On Item 7B. Superintendent of Recreation

Hansen shared that Thursday, April 30, at 6:00pm will be the 2015 Art on the Campus Grand Opening. He also shared that Tuesday, May 19 at 6:00pm will be the Grand Opening of the Holiday Park Baseball Complex renovation of fields 1 and 2. He noted that staff are all in full preparations for the summer. Chambers asked if the change in school start will impact the closing date at the pools. Hansen responded

that the goal is always to keep the pools open as long as possible until Labor Day but that staff is the biggest factor.

On Item 8. Other Matters

No items.

Receive, File and/or Refer:

On Item 9A. City Council Communications

March 23, 2015: Proclamation – Kids to Parks Day – May 16, 2015

March 23, 2015: Motion – Approval of Park Use Agreement – Des Moines Rugby Foundation

March 23, 2015: Motion – Approval of Park Use Agreement – Cricket League of Iowa

April 6, 2015: Proclamation – World Landscape Architecture Month

April 6, 2015: Motion – Approval of Grant Contract – Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship (IDALS) Water Quality Initiative Grant – City/School Campus Pong Watershed Improvements

April 6, 2015: Motion – Approval of Change Order #1 – 2015 Concrete Trail Renovation Project

Chambers moved to adjourn. Schebel seconded. Motion carried. Meeting adjourned at 7:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

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Susan Mathews

Administrative Secretary

ATTEST:

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Heather Schebel

Advisory Board Secretary